

Plan|Play|Pressure|Pause. Engaging Creative Information Practices

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Abstract

This alternative event is one of a series of successful iConference sessions developing a discourse that recognizes and appreciates what the creative milieu described by Howkins (2009) and Florida (2001) means for our creative information practices. Collectively, these events frame a new research area to engage and envision investigations into those practices. The 2013 event critically engages participants in creative practices by drawing upon Anderson's 4P heuristic (plan, play, pressure, pause) to scaffold creative engagements. Each of these "Ps" represents a different way of engaging with information. Working on the premise that having a mix of the four is critical in nurturing an innovative culture, participants are invited to become more mindful of the mix that might best suit their own contexts: be it in their personal practice or the practice of the communities they wish to serve. To wrap-up, participants envision next steps in this emerging research area.

Keywords: creativity, information practices, innovation cultures, creative ecologies, scholarly practice

Overview

Creativity is a vital part of human experience. In many Western societies we demonstrate our esteem for creativity by attending innovative movies, cutting edge musical performances, avant-garde art galleries, experimental theatre, and valorizing innovative entrepreneurs. We marvel at the creativity evident in inventive engagements with the urban environment (e.g., Knit Graffiti, Parkour, Yarn Bombing). Yet, too often we fail to recognize, appreciate and support the creativity needed to engage with our own ever-changing information environment. Bombarded with deterministic rhetoric that idolizes new information tools, it is easy to gloss over the fact that we *creatively* appropriate these tools into our daily practice. Until recently, we have not paid enough attention to the critical role creativity plays in relation to information practices.

This alternative event will cultivate budding interest in creative information practices. It is one of a series of successful iConference sessions developing a discourse that recognizes and appreciates what the creative milieu described by Howkins (2009) and Florida (2001) means for our creative information practices. The first creativity focused iConference event took place in 2011 as a preconference workshop. The workshop provided space for participants to take initial steps towards identifying methods for supporting and nurturing creativity. The 2012 iConference hosted an alternative event that focused on infusing creativity into information practices related to the research lifecycle (developing research questions, methodological choices, data analysis, communication research results). The research

process served as an organizing construct for the event. The 2013 iConference event *engages* participants in creative practices by drawing upon Anderson's 4P heuristic (plan, play, pressure, pause) to scaffold creative engagements (Anderson, 2012).

Collectively, this series of events frame a new research area, bringing together researchers and practitioners to engage and envision investigations into creative information practices.

Purpose

This alternative event is designed to:

- Identify, articulate, and engage in an array of creative information practices;
- Build a community of researchers interested in developing the field of creative information practices;
- Develop research questions to investigate creative information practices in local and global contexts;
- Generate an agenda for future scholarship and partnerships.

Intended Audience

Consistent with the call for alternative events that might kickstart thinking in creative ways, the engaging content and interactive format of this event is targeted to appeal to attendees interested in discussing, sharing and developing creative information practices. We have crafted versatile activities to accommodate any number of attendees. Our session is designed to enable participants to critically engage in creative information practices.

Details of proposed activities

Our event is framed by Anderson's 4P heuristic for stimulating creative information practices: plan, play, pressure, and pause (Anderson, 2012). Derived as part of her ongoing ethnographic investigations of research practice and the conditions underpinning creativity and innovation (see for instance: Anderson, 2011), each of these "Ps" represents a different way of engaging with information. Anderson asserts that having a mix of the four is critical in nurturing an innovative culture, although the balance depends on the individual context. During the session participants are invited to become more mindful of the mix that might best suit their own contexts: be it in their personal practice or the practice of the communities they wish to serve.

The event begins with each of the four organizers briefly elaborating on how attributes of the 4P framework are enacted through her personal creative information practice. For example, Eileen Trauth will present and discuss a short video clip showing a scene from her play, *iDream*, which was written to communicate the results of her research about barriers to women and under-represented minorities in the information technology field¹. Leanne Bowler will discuss how she enacted the planning piece of creativity through a "creativity audit" that is based on Anderson's 4P heuristic.

Participants will then move into break out groups, each group engaging an attribute of the 4P heuristic. Each group will be presented with a "starter problem" and asked to consider it through the lens of their particular "P". Participants will be encouraged to move amongst the groups in order to become aware of each of the elements.

During the final 30 minutes, participants will convene to share strategies and insights along with areas of uncertainty and discomfort. Throughout all stages of the event, scribes will record ideas for sharing and further discussion after the event. The organizers and participants will envision next steps in the emerging research area of creative information practices and discuss the most suitable means for post-event follow-ups and ongoing communication.

¹ Trauth has developed a creative, dramatic outlet as a means to "report" findings about her research on barriers imposed and internalized by women who aspire to careers in science and technology (Kiefer-Boyd, et al. forthcoming). See <http://www.eileentrauth.com/theatre-of-social-engagement.html>

Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

This event speaks to the conference themes of innovation and wisdom. Scholarship-in-action, we suggest, involves tapping more deliberately into our creative capacities – which we seek to model throughout the session and related conference activities. The event seeks to appeal to a wide audience, from experienced researchers to new doctoral students - anyone with an interest or concern in creativity.

Other special features of the event

Observers will be on hand to “witness” activities throughout the event using tools based on Anderson’s ethnographic work at earlier conferences. In this way, the organisers seek to inform organizers of future iConference gatherings of the opportunities (realized and missed) of the event.

The event will also be making active use of the contemplative space at the iConference as a locale for enacting Anderson’s “Pause” in her 4P heuristic. Suggestions for this space include a period of silent sitting meditation or a life writing activity.

References

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